



HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE DUNCAN HUNTER – CHAIRMAN

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Tactical Air and Land Forces Subcommittee Hearing Focuses on Combat Vehicle Active Protection Systems

Washington, D.C. — Defense Department witnesses strongly refuted claims made in recent NBC news broadcasts that the Army declined to pursue an allegedly available interim capability to protect combat vehicles against projectiles such as rocket propelled grenades and that soldiers lives have been lost unnecessarily as a result.

Tactical Air and Land Forces Subcommittee Chairman Curt Weldon (R-PA) agreed with witnesses on those points, noting that NBC News, although invited to appear before the subcommittee, declined to send a representative. Weldon referred to an early September NBC broadcast that “implied to the mothers and fathers of America that U.S. officials were not doing everything they can to give their sons and daughters the best possible equipment for the war on terrorism,” adding that, “I know that it doesn’t apply to me, and I’m confident [our witnesses] believe it doesn’t apply to them.”

According to Weldon, “The news segment in question further implied and quoted an unnamed official as saying that an active protection system is ‘ready today’ to be put on U.S. combat vehicles in Iraq. If that’s the case, then I want to know where that system is. The segment also interviewed a distraught mother who had lost her son, and implied that if only the Army had not blocked the Trophy Active Protection System, her son would be alive today. It further went on to infer that if the Army had not blocked this system, 132 lives that were lost might not have been lost. In actuality, the reported facts are that, even if this system had been deployed in Iraq on all of the vehicles for which it is designed, 122 of the 132 would still have been killed. The loss of one service member is unacceptable and one too many. But implying that 132 would have been saved is just factually incorrect and outrageous.”

Sorenson echoed his prepared testimony which says that “the Army considers Trophy an engineering development model designed to protect heavy armored combat vehicles. The Trophy system is not an operationally validated and proven system as proclaimed.”

The Advanced Protection System (APS) is intended to protect combat armored vehicles against projectiles such as rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and anti-tank guided missiles using a radar detection and kill mechanism that destroys the projectile in flight.

All witnesses agreed that developing such a system in which a projectile blows up a projectile is a challenging proposition, especially given the quick reaction time needed, the system's automated nature, and the need to prevent casualties among soldiers and civilians who may be nearby when such a system is employed—especially in an urban battle setting like Iraq.

Sorenson directly refuted claims that the Israeli Trophy could be used now, and pointed out that Israelis declined to use it on their own tanks during their recent engagement in Lebanon.

Both subcommittee members and witnesses emphasized that it was important to put concerns created by the NBC broadcast into proper context: improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and small arms fire—not RPGs—currently pose the greatest threats to combat troops.

Sorenson pointed out that “eighty-five percent of our attacks come from IEDs,” adding that “the total RPG attacks on our combat systems is a very small percentage, and even with that small percentage, most of the attacks resulted in no damage to the vehicles because of what we put on those vehicles—whether it's slat armor or reactive armor tiles.”

Rep. Rob Simmons (R-CT), a member of the House Armed Services Committee, was invited by Weldon to question the witnesses in today's hearing. Referring to his own exposure to RPGs in Vietnam, he noted the inherent challenge of eliminating collateral damage in developing APS, adding that “shooting a projectile to hit a projectile creates lethality. We don't want to create another hazard.”

Simmons offered anecdotal confirmation of the protective capability of current vehicle armor systems, mentioning his visit to a Stryker Brigade in Mosul, Iraq. “One of the soldiers told me that [his vehicle] got hit six times [by RPGs] and it continued to operate.”

Simmons concluded, “I don't see an immediate threat from the RPG in the field. I think we've met that threat. But, if we look to the future,” he added after referring to the adaptability of the enemy, “we might need alternate systems.”

Weldon did not let witnesses off the hook entirely. He took the Army to task about apparent DoD inconsistencies regarding the timing of being able to field the two system variants—the Israeli Trophy, and Raytheon's Quick Kill—and said that “the Army has not always been clear in responding to the public and Congress and has provided contradictory information on its active protection system.” He further pointed to unclear explanations about contractor selections, all of which, Weldon said, “has led to media accusations that the Army cooked the books in the selection of the contractor.” He added that the subcommittee intends to ask the Government Accountability Office to determine the facts in this source selection.

The Tactical Air and Land Forces Subcommittee met in open session, its sixth hearing exploring force protection issues.

Weldon concluded the session urging witnesses to continue to be aggressive in pursuing APS. “We are prepared to provide the financial support and the resources to fund those systems as you deem that they are appropriate and safe and will protect our troops from injury and death.”

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